

A Note on the Identity of the great Tsang-po of Tibet with the Dihong.—By
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Sir Clements Markham, President of the Royal Geographical Society in his learned introduction to “Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet,” regarding the course of the Tsang-po wrote as follows:—“Beyond the point where the Lhasa route crosses the river, in longitude $90^{\circ} 40'$ E., the course of the Brahmaputra within the mountains is entirely unknown for a distance of about 400 miles, when, under the name of Dihong, the mighty stream emerges into the valley of Assam and becomes the Brahmaputra of the plains. Yet there can be no reasonable doubt that the Tsang-po of great Tibet and the Brahmaputra of the plains are one and the same river.”

This question has occupied the attention of geographers for upwards of a century. In his instructions, dated 1774, Warren Hastings specially enjoined Mr. Bogle to inform himself respecting the course of the Brahmaputra. D’Anville, and afterwards Klaproth, believed that the Tibet river was the upper course of the Irrawaddy. In 1825 Captains Bulton and Wilcox were sent to explore its course. Bulton followed up the course of the Dihong, until he was stopped by wild tribes, while Wilcox crossed the water-parting towards Burma, and reached the banks of the Irrawaddy. From the point reached by Bulton on the Dihong, to the place where Manning crossed the Tsang-po, there is an interval of about 400 miles, and a difference of level of 11,000 feet. This interval was entirely unknown till 1882 when I explored up to Saugrī Khamar, a place situated to the east of the town of Chethang on the Tsang-po where it crosses 92° Lg., and Lama Ugyen Gyatsho, about 50 miles further east up to the confines of the province of Kongbu; and Kunthup has done, though not scientifically, further 200 miles, so that out of 400 now only about 50 miles remain to be explored.

In July 1880, a Lama of Gya-rong was despatched by the late

Captain Harman from Darjeeling to Tibet with orders to explore the country below Gyala Sing-dong and trace the great Tsang-po to the plains of India, or failing this, to throw marked logs into the stream at the lowest point reached. It was intended that due notice should be given by the Lama to Captain Harman of the period during which the logs were daily to be cast into the river, so that he might set watches at the place where the Dihong debouches into Assam, and thus prove the identity or otherwise of the great river of Tibet with the Brahmaputra. Kunthup, a native of Sikkim, who had previously accompanied the explorer Nima Sring to Gyala Sing-dong and who has since traversed Bhutān with Rinzing, was sent with the Gya-rong Lama as assistant. The proposed arrangements for casting logs into the Tsang-po fell through owing to the delinquency of the Lama, who having sold Kunthup as a slave in the Pema-koi country decamped to his home in Gya-rong within the Chinese frontier.

Kunthup having escaped from the hands of his master, reached Onlek a short stage from Mir Padam, or Miri Padam, a village situated on a plain on the Tsang-po, a resort of traders from Assam, and the abode of the Miri and Padam tribes, who are known to inhabit the country near the place where the Dihong breaks through the hills into Assam. He was informed at Onlek that Miri Padam was about three days' journey or 35 miles from the nearest plains of India. Kunthup also saw the haze of India from Onlek in an easterly direction when looking down the river. According to native report and also legend, the Tsang-po enters a deep rocky gorge at the foot of a rocky mountain which has the appearance of a lion's face and is therefore called Sing-dong, from *sing* a lion and *dong* a face. Kunthup describes the falls of the Tsang-po below the Pema-koi monastery as a cascade of some 150 feet in height, and mentions the prismatic colours of the spray hanging over the dark basin or lake below the cliff. This rock is called Shin-jē-shējal, *i. e.*, the place of interview with the Lord of the Dead. *Shin* the dead, *jē* lord, and *shē-jal* an interview.

Since then Mr. Needham, a political officer, resident near Sudya in Assam, has explored a part of the mountainous country, inhabited by Mishmi and other wild tribes, up to the borders of Za-yul, but has not succeeded in following up the course of the Dihong. The inscription before us and the letter of Mr. Barnes, quoted below, go to prove that the Dihong is the great Tsang-po, as it was conjectured by the late General Walker. The wooden block on which the inscription is, came down from the Tsang-po. It must have belonged to some one of the Nij-ma monasteries of Tibet or to the monastery of Pema-koi, the last of the Buddhist institutions of Tibet, situated to the further East of

Tibet. My friend and tutor Lama Sherab resided twelve years at the Pema-koi monastery and knows the country well. The charm contained in the inscription is corrupt Sanskrit written in Tibetan and repeated twenty-five times. It belongs to the Nīṃ-ma-pa or the older red-cap School of Tibet. The following is a transcript :—

(1.) ཨོཾ་ བ་རྩ་ས་དྲ་ ས་ས་ཡ་ས་ལྷ་ལྷ་ལྷ་ བ་རྩ་ས་དྲ་ དྲ་ རོ་ བ་དེ་ལྷ་
འི་རྩ་ མེ་ ལྷ་ལྷ་ལྷ་ དེ་ལྷ་ མེ་ ལྷ་ལྷ་ལྷ་ བེ་ལྷ་

(2.) མེ་ ལྷ་ལྷ་ ཨ་ལྷ་ར་ལྷ་ མེ་ ལྷ་ལྷ་ ས་བེ་སིད་དྲི་ མེ་ ལྷ་ཡ་ཙ་ ས་བེ་
ཀམ་ལྷ་ཙ་ མེ་ ཙི་དྲི་ བེ་ཡ་མེ་ ཀྱ་ལྷ་

(3.) ཧྲི་ཧྲི་ཧྲི་ཧྲི་ཧྲི་ ལྷ་ལྷ་ལྷ་ ས་བེ་དྲ་ལྷ་ལྷ་ བ་རྩ་ས་ མེ་ ལྷ་ལྷ་
བ་རྩ་ ལྷ་ལྷ་ ས་ལྷ་ས་ས་ཡ་ ས་དྲ་ལྷ་མེ་

(1.) Ōm, vajrasatva! samayam=anupālaya, vajrasatva! tvē nō patiṣṭha; dridhō mē bhavaṣu, toṣyō mē bhavaṣu, pōṣyō.

(2.) mē bhava, anuraktō mē bhava, sarvasiddhi mē prayaccha, sarvakarmasu ca mē cittam çrēyaḥ kuru.

(3.) Hūm-ha-ha-ha-ha-hōḥ! Bhagavan Sarva-Tathāgata! vajram mē muñca, vajri bhava mahāsamaya satva-āḥ!

Translation :

(1.) Ōm, vajrasattva! keep thy duties; O vajrasattva, ground us upon thee; be strong to me, be delighted with me.

(2.) Be kind unto me, be cheerful unto me; grant me every success, and in all my actions make pure my heart!

Line 3 seems rather untranslatable.

The letter of Mr. H. C. Barnes, Assistant Commissioner of Dibrugarh, dated the 22nd October, 1896, is as follows :—

“I enclose a print taken from a piece of wood found in the Brahmaputra a few miles above Dibrugarh a short time ago. When brought in, it appeared that the block was meant for printing from, as, though the surface of the letters was clean, the whole of the carved out portion of the wood, *i.e.*, the space between the letters, was covered with what

looked like ink. Moreover, though no one could say what the writing was by mere inspection of the block; some Khamptis on seeing a print taken from it, declared that it was a Lama, *i.e.*, Tibetan, writing. You will observe that the lines are similar, so that a translation of one will give the meaning of the whole. I should be obliged if you would send me a translation and also inform me what the block was used for. If my conjecture that it was used for printing from is wrong and the Khamptis have misled me, I can send you a rubbing of the block.

“The block is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick and it has no marks on the sides or back to show that it has ever been fastened to anything else. It is supposed to have been brought down the Dihong by the last flood, which was probably caused by the breaking through of a dam formed across the Dihong by a former landslip. The flood rose to a great height in one night in fine weather and no other river came down in flood except the Dihong. The piece of wood was found by an Assamese who was looking for firewood.”

